



*Seeds of
Compassion*

NURTURING THE HEART OF BALLARAT

AUGUST 2024

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Context



Early in 2024, Ballarat witnessed several traumatic events – including homes lost from fires – a mine collapse which killed one person, badly injured another, and trapped over twenty miners – the deaths of three women, two allegedly at the hands of their partners, one who was kidnapped and killed while out jogging.

One response of the Ballarat City Council to these events was to request Compassionate Ballarat to provide a proposal for a community-wide project to support Ballarat residents in dealing with the suffering associated with these

distressing events; this invitation included a proposal to work with Ballarat Parks and Gardens to plant a garden bed as a visual image of this project.

The purpose of this project was to plant seeds of compassion to promote Ballarat as a caring city underpinned by the compassionate wishes of its future leaders. Compassionate wishes were collected from participating schools, and these have now been captured in this book, and will be shared throughout Ballarat and with compassionate cities across the world.

Engagement Process

To engage schools in this project, letters of invitation were sent to Year 6 classes in primary schools and Year 10 classes in secondary schools in Ballarat. This invitation was accompanied by a Teacher's Guide which outlined a process for capturing the wishes – that Guide is in Appendix 1

The following schools participated in this project:

- Ballarat High School
- Emmaus Primary School
- Loreto College
- Sebastopol Primary School
- St Alipius Primary School
- Ballarat Grammar Junior School
- St Patrick's College
- St Thomas More Primary School
- St James' Parish School

Compassion as a value and as a science

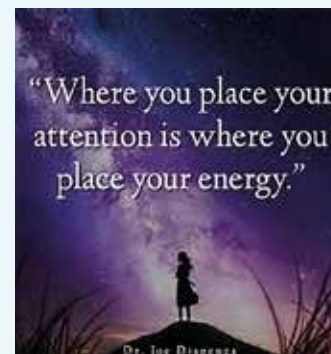
For centuries the value of compassion has been central to many spiritual and contemplative traditions. Ranked a great virtue in numerous philosophies, compassion is considered in almost all the major religious traditions as among the greatest of virtues. The value of compassion invites us to nourish the relational bonds that sustain us in harmony with others, particularly in difficult times.

More recently, compassion has become the focus of research studies – and these studies explore our understanding of the mechanisms, interventions, and application of the evidence-based approaches to fostering compassion in individuals, organizations, communities, and societies.

Developing the advanced levels of cooperation required for our collective wellbeing now and into the future will necessity that we prioritise the development of compassion and other prosocial skills and capabilities, and current studies into compassion studies are exploring the prosocial motivations that orientate humans to be sensitive to all suffering, and to find helpful ways to alleviate and prevent that suffering.

Compassion science conceptualises compassion as a motivation that, in evolutionary terms organised human attention, thoughts, feelings, and actions in very different and more constructive ways, to harmful motivations such as revenge or malice.

Importance of wishes



Wishes are powerful – just ask Karen Aren Armstrong. After the winning the best TED talk for 2006, TEDX asked Karen what she wished for – and Karen said that she wished for a more compassionate world. TEDX gave her \$100,000 to bring this wish to fruition and this funding

laid the foundation for a global movement to be established led by the Charter for Compassion – the Charter now operates in nearly 600 communities across the world, reaching nearly 6 million people.

Wishes work by clarifying what we would like to see in the world around us. Positive psychology has sought to understand how, where we put our attention stimulates our brain to see new opportunities. The saying goes – *where you place your attention is where you place your energy.*

Importance of gardens



One of the key foundation stories of Ballarat is that it's a garden city, whose designers cared for the environment and beautified the city. This project planted seeds of compassion to promote Ballarat as a caring city underpinned by the compassionate wishes of its future leaders.

To create the Ballarat Botanic Gardens a decision was made to convert the Ballarat Police Horse Paddock into a botanical garden. George Longley was appointed the first curator, who was tasked with converting the design into a reality. The Ballarat Horticultural Society is the oldest continuous horticultural society in Australia. Ballarat is well-known for its beautiful gardens and for the philanthropic donations by those who came here in the 1850's and bestowed the beautiful marble statues, including the Stoddart Statue collection of 12 white marble figures from Italy donated by Thomas Stoddart in 1884.

Theory of change

At one level this project could simply be seen as a feel-good exercise – ‘nice to have’ but one that won’t make a difference – we disagree.

This project has been guided by a theory of change which reasons that in our fractured world, this new approach to the ancient value of compassion is important, because there is considerable evidence that when people are caring towards others and feel cared for by others, their physical and mental health improves. Therefore, being motivated to help and better connect with others makes a positive difference not just at an individual level, but also at a social and systems level. Prof Paul Gilbert, Director, Compassionate Mind Foundation, UK, reminds us that the motivation of compassion ...*pushes us to understand how we have structured the world, and to ask, how can we structure it better, not because we may suffer, but because others are suffering.*

Greg Fischer, the Inaugural Chair of the US Centre for the Business Leaders and Mayors for Compassionate and Equitable Cities in his recent presentation to mayors across Victoria on the newly released report, ‘A Mayors Guide to a Compassionate City,’ asked a crucial question: *Could you use a city as a platform for human flourishing?*

The outcomes from this project encourages us to hope that the motivation of compassion could play a central role in supporting our city to become a platform for human flourishing. This is because our motivations organise our thoughts, feelings, and actions – and as previously mentioned, a motivation of compassion will organise our thoughts, feelings, and actions in very different and more positive ways to that of negative motivations such as revenge or retribution.

If we were to fully embed these wishes into every aspect of life here in Ballarat – our city would be changed.

Hugh Mackay wrote in The Kindness Revolution – if we dare to dream of a more kinder, more compassionate, more creative, more inclusive country – then we need to live ‘as if’ we are already in that country.

It’s now up to the people of Ballarat to take up the challenge inherent in the expressed wishes of its school students, to indeed make our city one in which we can all have the privilege of experiencing: Inclusion, Acceptance, Belonging, Respect, Unity, Peace, Safeness, Protection, Compassion, Cohesion, Harmony, Equality, Thriving, Meaning, Potential.

Compassionate wishes' themes

Nearly 100 wishes were received from Ballarat students in Year 6 and Year 10 classes and the collected wishes were subject to a content analysis – a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data. The emerging themes were then written up under the following five headings:

1. INCLUSION – ACCEPTANCE – BELONGING

2. RESPECT – UNITY – PEACE

3. SAFE – PROTECTED – COMPASSIONATE

4. COHESION – HARMONY – EQUALITY

5. THRIVING – MEANING – POTENTIAL

These themes have also been captured in the Word Map below:



THEME 1

Inclusion - Acceptance - Belonging



What did the students say?

The wishes as outlined by the students within Theme 1 go to the heart of our need for acceptance and belonging – but importantly they also point out that we can often create that sense of belonging by excluding others i.e. by creating

'in' and 'out' groups through judging and shaming 'others' – the students expressions are heartfelt in their desire for this very human need to belong despite our many differences – asking us to be more open-minded and accepting of all those living in Ballarat.

Students' Wishes

“ I wish that no matter who people are, they have all the opportunities everyone else has.

“ I wish for every person to feel like they belong and feel like they are loved, because everyone deserves that.

“ I wish for children to be understood and to be taken seriously. To not be taken as a joke by saying to them, that it is just their imagination.

“ I wish that people were kind to each other.

“ We wish that everyone could be themselves without getting judged or shamed.

“ We wish that no one in the world regardless of race, gender or beliefs is discriminated against in any form.

“ We wish for...greater access to self-care spaces.

“ All people, especially Ballarat's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, feel acknowledged and have a voice in the decisions made in our community.

“ I wish that people could learn that 'normal' is a myth.

“ We wish for...warm and safe environments for our homeless.

“ I wish for the young people of Ballarat to get better from the suffering they have to go through.

“ I wish that people could be more open-minded and accept those around them for who they are.

What does the research say?

Humans are social creatures who need each other – we have survived as a species because we developed the social cohesion necessary for our mental and emotional health. Our wellbeing and sense of belonging is intrinsically linked with that of our community. A sense of belonging is important in healthy human development as feeling part of a group helps us to combat our fears and anxieties.

A large part of a child's self-esteem comes from feeling that they have a place in the world where they belong to and matter to others. The need to belong is based on a motivational human need to maintain interpersonal relationships and positive social bonds, and as such, becomes significant for our overall development and well-being.

And as adults it's important to recognise that working to advance our shared humanity doesn't mean pretending everyone is exactly the same. At a time of social division, it's crucial for more people to see what they have in common; not to erase our differences, but to embrace them in order to build a more just society. As Pema Chodron, Author, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* writes – *Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity.*

What is the call to action?

- Introduce programs that increase our sense of belonging in our schools, our workplaces, our sporting clubs, our places of worship, our families, and neighbourhoods. These actions could include establishing 'pop-up' civic spaces throughout the city where people can gather, connect, and share significant events to recognise that social belonging involves a sense of interconnectedness.
- Develop creative opportunities for sharing and listening to our local indigenous story telling.
- Ballarat residents could also take time to visit the newly created intercultural garden (crn of Sturt and Pleasant Sts) – to reflect on the history of all those from cultures around the world who came to Ballarat in the time of the Goldrush and who continue to make Ballarat home now.
- Making conversation is critical to increasing our sense of belonging, therefore we could take time to undertake new activities and to meet new people – ask questions, make small talk, self-disclose skilfully, and listen to people's responses. Keep and teach an open mind.
- Creative Ballarat continue to support and highlight our local musicians, particularly through concerts in our laneways and open spaces.



THEME 2

Respect - Unity - Peace

What did the students say?

Within Theme 2 the students recognise the complexity of the human mind when it is dealing with those, we perceive to be unlike ourselves. They identify the importance of everyone being heard and acknowledged – and call for us to develop our emotional intelligence so that all opinions are respected and valued – in addition, they ask us to understand the role respect plays in lessening all forms of violence, particularly violence against women – they ask us to extend our respect to those we live with, those we go to school and university with, the elderly, the homeless, and to those with disabilities – and they wish for community-wide acceptance of all.

Students' Wishes

“ I wish that bullying, cyber or otherwise, could be eliminated within our community and we could all come together in unity.

“ Together, we can forge a path of healing through the trials of violence, loss, and heartache. In unity, we find our strength; in compassion, we find our hope. Let's stand hand in hand to create a safer, stronger community where every heart can heal and thrive.

“ I wish that people can share opinions with respect and equal value.

“ I wish there was less domestic violence and more peace and respect.

“ All people, especially Ballarat's older people, feel safe, connected, and respected.

“ All people, especially those with disabilities, can have access and inclusion in all that Ballarat has to offer.

“ To being an end to the aggression towards front-line workers, ensuring respectful relationships are always present.

“ We wish that everyone across the world feels safe and supported to be who they truly are.

“ We wish for every parent and guardians to be treated the way they deserve.

“ We wish that everyone could be themselves without getting judged or shamed.

“ I wish that everyone in Ballarat could have a home and that no one would be outside in the winter living on the streets.

“ I wish that people would have more respect for others and be more open-minded.

“ My wish for Ballarat is that people would try harder to put rubbish in the bins and look after our earth.

“ That people would apologise when they make a mistake.

“ I wish that when people see a need, they would help people.

“ I wish that all the people in Ballarat could work together with social togetherness and peace.

“ I wish people looked for peace instead of power, making war history.

“ I wish for a safe community where people of different nationalities and sexualities can live together in harmony in peace.

“ I wish people looked for peace instead of power, making war history.

“ I wish more women could work in the defence forces and the Australian army. I wish people could see there is no such thing as jobs for men and jobs for women.

What does the research say?

Reinforcing the civilising capacities of compassion, Director of the Greater Good Science Centre, Dr Emiliana Simon-Thomas affirmed that ...in our journey as a human species we have survived by being sensitive to one another. ...that sensitivity was the evolutionary quality or adaptation that has led to our intelligence as a species and many studies, including those done by the Greater Good Science Centre at the University of California, Berkeley, are generating clear evidence that compassion works.

With the growing number of domestic violence incidents – respect is becoming more important in recognizing the worth of all those we live with, work and study with, and connect with in our community.

Respect means that you accept somebody for who they are and when we practice respect for others – it builds feelings of trust, safety, and wellbeing. But as we are seeing around us respect often doesn't come naturally – it is something we all need to learn and to apply. The children's wishes for respect in our city echoes the words of Hugh Mackay who says '... that the measure of a society's greatness is how it treats its most vulnerable members'.

What is the call to action?

- Consider doing a common humanity exercise such as – instead of seeing a person as someone unfamiliar to you or as a member of an outgroup, try to see this person as an individual, one whose tastes and experiences might overlap with yours in certain ways, for example while the

person may be from a different cultural background, they may work in the same field, barrack for the same football team, or love the same music.

- For all adults in Ballarat to think on how they can display respect to others, especially in front of children so that children can learn what respect looks like.
- Continue to increase the number of programs addressing violence in our city – for example the Committee for Ballarat is partnering with Women's Health Grampians to deliver the Men's Initiative – which is a program for men who are keen to be strong allies and advocates in the community to amplify the message “Enough” and help stamp out gendered violence. It is an innovative and evidence-based model that aims to build the capacity of men in communities to identify and call out gender inequality, sexism and discrimination.
- To improve students understanding of peace that schools in Ballarat consider incorporating peace education and planting peace poles in their school grounds as peace poles come with peace education resources.
- Consciously develop deeper levels of respect within the workplace by recognising and appreciating the unique perspectives and backgrounds that each employee brings to the table, and by creating cultures that support staff and clients in experiencing and practicing psychological safety.
- Once the new national memorial for survivors of sexual abuse has been completed in Victoria Park we take the time to visit and reflect on the ways we can ensure that type of violence is prevented.

THEME 3

Safe – Protected – Compassionate



What did the students say?

Wishing that everyone could be safe was the students' foremost wish for the people of Ballarat – that we can all be safe in our homes – safe on the streets – safe on public transport – safe at work – safe in aged care – safe in

schools – safe on the roads – they wish for all young people to have a trusted friend they can speak with when feeling afraid – they wished that no one has to feel worried about being attacked in our city – rather that every one of us acts compassionately and feels connected – mostly, they just wish for Ballarat to be a safe city to live in.

Students' Wishes

“ I wish that homelessness could be eliminated in Ballarat, and that there was more funding to support a safe place for all.

“ I wish that domestic violence victims could feel safe and protected by their community and have access to safe places.

“ I wish that all children in Ballarat schools, homes and families can feel safe and loved.

“ I wish that every child feels safe in their home.

“ I wish that all children in Ballarat schools, homes and families can feel safe and loved.

“ I wish that every child feels safe in their home.

“ We wish that everyone has a home, whether that be a place or a person, to feel safe with/within.

“ We wish for...safe roads for our children and drivers.

“ I wish that Ballarat had less violence and that we could work more together as a team to make it a safer and better place for everyone.

“ We wish every single person feels love, compassion and connection and has a trusted person that they can talk to.

“ When people are sad or having a hard time at home they can talk to a friendly family.

“ I wish that the people of Ballarat don't have to worry about getting attacked or kidnapped while just going for a run or to be scared to be home alone or to go out alone.

“ No one should ever make you feel uncomfortable in any way – if they do talk to someone

“ I wish for Ballarat to have people in their homes not needing safety cameras, so they don't have need security in and out of their house because they are worried about their safety.

“ We wish that the people of Ballarat could focus on being kind, compassionate and honest individuals.

“ I wish Ballarat could get its reputation back.

“ I wish to walk down the street and not feel scared that something bad could happen.

“ I wish for women's safety in Ballarat.

“ I wish we could feel safe on public transport, so Ballarat is a place that supports each other's safety and wellbeing.

“ I wish for the young people of Ballarat to not feel scared or worried when walking around town or traveling by themselves.

What does the research say?

Prof Paul Gilbert, Director of the Compassionate Mind Foundation, UK makes a distinction between three aspects of being safe – these include safety checking – safety seeking – and safeness. He explains that safety checking relates to monitoring for the absence and avoidance of threat, while safety seeking links to the destination of the defensive behaviour (e.g., running home).

Safety seeking relates to maintaining vigilance to the appearance of potential harms and doing things believed to avoid harm. Threat-defending and safety checking and seeking are regulated primarily through our threat systems which monitor the nature, presence, controllability and/or absence of threat.

Safeness on the other hand uses different monitoring systems for the presence of internal and external resources that support threat-coping, risk-taking, resource exploration. Creating brain states that recruit safeness processing can impact how standard evidence-based therapies (e.g., exposure, distress tolerance and reappraisal) are experienced and can produce long-term change. In other words, we will feel safer when we are engaging in safeness behaviours because they are empowering, whereas safety checking constantly reminds us that we need to be on the lookout which triggers our threat fight/flight system.

Dr Sue Carter says that compassion for others also has health benefits, and that is because compassion produces oxytocin in the body which creates a sense of safeness, which in turn allows us to generate compassionate responses.

What is the call to action?

- Set up more adventure playgrounds for children that are not digital based to support stress reduction in children.
- Adults in Ballarat become more aware of how their behaviour is impacting the children around them to consider making conscious decisions to put away devices and play with their children more.
- To support our very young children learning emotional regulation, Ballarat kindergartens consider offering the social and emotional learning program *Think Equal*. This program was developed by the Yale University's Centre for Emotional Development and has been the subject of three randomised control trials all of which confirmed that the children who completed this program were better able to regulate emotions, such as anger, and were able to connect with other children, both important aspects of developing a sense of safeness.
- Commit to more access to nature and the wilds, more communal meeting places and activities, because our sense of connection to others, is the ultimate buffering layer of protection, the many hands and hearts that pick us up from our inevitable moments of despair.
- Participate in creating places within our city that invite young adults to stay long enough to bump into someone they know, that are enlivened by smiles, laughs, music, artworks, and just by the presence of others.

THEME 4

Cohesion - Harmony - Equality



What did the students say?

Here the students wish for us all to be more willing to better support each other and work together to turn our challenges into new chances for a better future – for our city to be one in which people value diversity enough so we can use all kinds of minds to build community – they wish trust was flowing throughout the community, alongside positive, peaceful, and pure connections – for equality that

is constant and secure – they wish for this now, more than ever – they are calling for us all to be a community, where we look out for each other – where our elderly can be more connected – where those with a mental illness can access the support networks they need – and where people are not judged but are valued for who they are – in particular they wish for gender-based violence to end, so girls don't have to experience violence as '...just a part of what they have to deal with, on top of everything else'.

Students' Wishes

“ I wish that people can share opinions with respect and equal value.

“ I wish for people to actually value diversity so we can use all kinds of minds to build community.

“ I wish for equality in the community.

“ I wish that everyone was accepted into the community and felt welcomed.

“ That many will strive to work for an equitable distribution of wealth.

“ We wish to achieve easier access to services for those in need.

“ We wish for... more community hubs.

“ I wish that adults and elderly of Ballarat felt more connected and involved.

“ I wish for us to act together, to move forward, to benefit each and every person.

“ Even when things get hard, we're stronger when we stick together. Let's look out for each other and make our community a place where everyone feels safe and supported.

“ I wish that Ballarat would act more as a community and not as individuals fighting against each other.

“ I wish that those suffering mental health issues could access the help they need to feel happy and be able to function well within our community.

“ I wish that everyone feels valued as a person and feel safe and that they belong in the places they like.

“ I wish people are judged by who they are and not by what society labels them as.

“ All people, especially members of Ballarat's LGBTQI+ community, feel safe, respected and free from discrimination.

“ We wish to belong to an inclusive community that stands against violence towards all women.

“ My wish is for gender-based violence to end. It's not fair that the unthinking actions of one person can affect so many people and end lives. It's not fair that we have to be scared for our safety because of other people. We shouldn't be expected to just accept the fact that we as women and girls are constantly in danger. I refuse to say that it's just a part of what we have to deal with, on top of everything else.

“ I wish that people don't judge other people.

“ We wish for...less expensive medical treatments.

“ We wish trust was flowing throughout the community, alongside positive, peaceful, and pure connections. For equality that is constant and secure. We wish for this now, more than ever.

What does the research say?

City and business leaders have a role to play in ensuring their organisations are places where harmony, equality and cohesion are explained, because motivations such as compassion shape our behaviours in ways that are protective of social relationships and social exchanges. In a forum organised by Compassionate Ballarat in 2022 guest presenter Dr Laura Burgess, CEO of the Human Values Centre, and Board member global Charter for Compassion stated that '...city leaders have a moral imperative to act on behalf of the wellbeing of citizens to promote mental health and wellbeing so that communities can flourish'.

Cohesion comes from improving our levels of shared trust and trust is important because it offers real protection against the uncertainty of these times. The motivation of compassion helps build trust because it acknowledges that everyone's wellbeing is important. The OECD in its recent *Society at a Glance 2024* report states that... *a cohesive society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility.*

In this context social infrastructure is essential for the rebuilding of a more cohesive, civil, and forward-looking society. Social infrastructure helps shape our interactions and when it is robust, it fosters all kinds of social interactions, help build relationships, and turn community from a vague

concept into a lived experience. On the other hand, as Eric Kleinberg in his book *Palaces for the People* notes when social infrastructure is degraded and neglected, it makes it far more likely that city residents will grow isolated and be left to fend for themselves.

What is the call to action?

- Develop additional programs that sustains trust in our community, alongside positive, peaceful, and pure connections.
- Program that supports equality being constant and secure.
- Continue to improve our city's social infrastructure such as libraries, playgrounds, and other public meeting spaces.
- Local government to continue to develop programs that empower relevant organisations with resources and support to drive meaningful change for those who do not have a voice.
- Continuing to develop new approaches to establishing wellness centres for the whole community – centres that specifically address the suffering in that community and connect people in ways that make them feel protected and included.

THEME 5

Thriving – Meaning – Potential



What did the students say?

Within Theme 5 the students are wanting Ballarat to be a community where everyone gets a second chance – where happy memories can be laid down and remembered – where everyone has a trusted person they can turn to – and can make better choices – they wished that people in

Ballarat know that while they can't change the past, they can change the future – and they wished that all young people deeply appreciate that difficult challenges can be turned into new chances, where better choices are made – and importantly they wish that when things are tough, we can start fresh and keep working to make our community amazing.

Students' Wishes

“ I wish that people could learn that 'normal' is a myth.

“ I wish people could get more chances when they make a mistake.

“ I wish that Ballarat could accept more refugees and give them a better chance at life.

“ I wish we could prioritise the people who are in need.

“ We wish that everybody has happy memories that they can look back on and smile.

“ We wish every single person feels love, compassion and connection and has a trusted person that they can talk to.

“ All children in Ballarat have the same opportunities to grow and learn and that they have the right to be safe and respected, no matter where they live or what school they go to.

“ I wish that people would appreciate the little things and make better choices.

“ I wish that everyone in Ballarat could have a home and that no one would be outside in the winter living on the streets.

“ I wish that people realise that while they can't change the past – they can change the future.

“ I wish I could be proud to say I come from Ballarat, a town that values its people and what they bring to the community as opposed to its economics.

“ I wish that everyone feels safe in our society and that they are supported in everything they do and everything they believe in.

“ When things are tough, let us know there will be a time when we can start fresh and keep working to make our community amazing. By supporting each other and working together, we can turn our challenges into new chances for a better, safer future.

What does the research say?

Dr Kristen Neff who researches self-compassion notes that unlike self-criticism – self-compassion allows us to accept that we have failed without that being interpreted as ‘I am a failure’ which in turns means that we are free to focus on how do we learn and grow, being able to ask ‘how do I move forward?’

With increasing levels of mental health issues in our communities being reported – our capacity to self-regulate in ways that support us in having a meaningful life is becoming more important. A just released report from the Lancet Psychiatry Commission on Youth Mental Health has found there is an urgent need to address youth mental health. It states that mental ill health, which has been the leading health and social issue impacting the lives and futures of young people for decades, has entered a dangerous phase, and is a major threat to the lives and futures of young people. World Health Organisation (WHO) spokesperson Carla Drysdale said that all countries should take steps to improve mental health prevention and care for young people – building a non-specialist workforce that includes school counsellors, community-based workers and peers is crucial. The research also points to the importance of gratitude practices in supporting people to thrive – one exercise is to write down three things that went well each day and to do this every night, for five weeks. Those who were assigned to do this, versus simply writing about memories, had higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depressive symptoms, even six months later (Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson).

In addition to personal practices, the ways in which our cities are designed also have a role to play in creating the opportunities for residents to cooperate with each other in meaningful ways. Jenny Donovan, landscape designer and author of ‘Designing the Compassionate City: Creating

Places Where People Thrive’, states that designing our towns and cities in collaboration with those who live in them can create places that help people to forge connections that meet their needs, to thrive and to fulfill their potential.

What is the call to action?

- To create a community where our young people can thrive and flourish – our youth organisations work on fashioning a healing culture across the city that teaches young people to develop and maintain hope and meaning.
- Individually young people could take time every day to respond to their life situations with care and kindness instead of self-judgement and self-criticism.
- Bring some practices in daily life to increase gratitude, by taking time once per week for ten weeks to reflect upon five things in life that one was grateful for and writing these down.
- Set meaningful life goals and work towards as these goals can help us flourish, because our goals can help us better understand what really matters to us so that we can pursue meaning more easily.
- Consider volunteering as that can help us flourish by providing a sense of social connection, purpose, happiness, and well-being.



Planting the seeds of compassion in schools

In addition to the official City Parks and Gardens planting, many of the schools themselves also planted gardens within their school grounds in recognition of their participation in this project.

Emmaus Primary School



St Patrick's College



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School



Compassion in communities – another example

This is not the only project to have had a focus on compassion in communities – the group Australia Remade, an alliance of over 200 civil society and community leaders and citizens recently asked Australians across the country the question: *Imagine you have woken up in the Australia of your dreams. What is that like?*

From the answers to this question, they developed nine pillars, and the 6th pillar is depicted as a 'Country of flourishing communities', which they describe as '... compassionate and connected' where:

- Our communities are places of music, fun and playfulness, kindness, and generosity. The air is clean, and the shade is plentiful. Neighbours talk to each other, and children play in the streets.
- Good infrastructure such as public transport, public parks, collective gardens, and collective tool sheds help us get out of our houses and into each other's company. We connect with each other in our communities, over sports, books, creative arts, gardening, clubs and more. Artists, musicians, and storytellers have pride of place in our culture: we relish the joy, insight and meaning they bring to our lives.
- Our education system equips us to live meaningful lives. Not only are we taught how to read and write but also how to think critically, build relationships, nurture creativity, and listen to different perspectives. We learn about our own worth and we learn the art of belonging.

- Families, neighbours, and communities look after one another. Everyone is included.
- There are spaces for children and teenagers to participate fully in community life. We pride ourselves on a strong sense of community spirit, teaching our children by example how to be good neighbours and friends. We make sure that regardless of age, old, young or in the middle, we all have a place.
- And... we have time. Time to care and be cared for. Time to enjoy our families and each other, to savour this beautiful earth, to be creative and to rest.

Australia ReMade concluded from listening to hundreds of people, from many walks of life, that the hopes and dreams we share for our future are staggeringly similar.

And here in this Seeds of Compassion project these very human wishes are once again astonishingly similar.

While we all wish for the same thing – we shouldn't underestimate the effort it will take at an individual, societal and systems level to make real the students' wishes and their 'calls to action'.

For each of us, our challenge is to read these wishes and to ask: What can I do to bring them to fruition?

Next Steps



The philosopher Shannon Vallor says that our human virtues – which include those conveyed in the wishes of our students – hold the key to meeting the tremendous challenges we all now face. Indeed, she says without them we will not be able to create the new ways we need to flourish together or to deepen the knowledge of who we are, and what we can do together.

While healing wishes in themselves are powerful tools, they also need to be implemented. During the formal launch of this project, the Ballarat Mayor Des Hudson invited the participating students hand their written wishes to him and to the other adults at the launch as a 'call to action' to all Ballarat residents to help the students' wishes for our city come true.

The student's wishes will be distributed across Ballarat, and they will also be circulated to cities around the world who have signed the Charter for Compassion. By sharing this report globally, we offer these cities a valuable demonstration project for them to consider replicating.

Importantly, Compassionate Ballarat will continue to work with the City Council to make tangible, as many of these wishes as possible.

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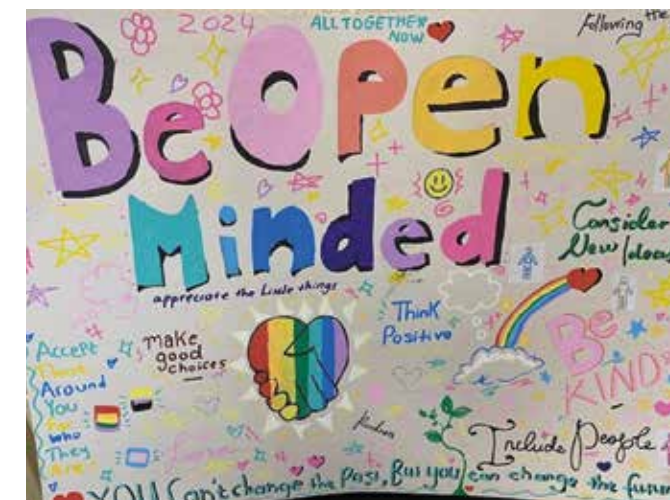
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APPENDIX 1

Teachers Guide –

Invitation to nurture the heart of Ballarat planting seeds of compassion project

Project background

Ballarat has recently experienced several traumas that have affected the whole community. In response Ballarat City Council has requested Compassionate Ballarat to work on a community-wide project to support Ballarat citizens who have been affected in dealing with the suffering associated with these distressing events.

One of the key foundation stories of Ballarat is that it's a garden city, whose founders cared for the environment and beautified the city.

Therefore, this project is about planting seeds of compassion to promote Ballarat as a caring city supported by the compassionate wishes of its future leaders.



About Compassionate Ballarat

Compassionate Ballarat is a member of the global Charter for Compassion. The Charter for Compassion is a document and worldwide movement designed to restore not only compassionate thinking but, more importantly, compassionate action, to the centre of our lives.

Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group provides compassionate resources, including educational and community forums, and our work with other compassionate cities across the world assist all those in Ballarat wanting to create a more flourishing and compassionate city.

About compassion

Compassion explores what motivates humans to care for one another. One accepted definition of compassion is *the willingness and sensitivity to see suffering with a resourced capacity to take action to alleviate that suffering*.

Dr Emiliania Simon-Thomas notes that *...in our journey as a human species we have survived by being sensitive to one another*. Better understanding compassion is important because that can provide us with deeper insights into how human motivations guide our thoughts and behaviours, and to better understand how the motivation and courage of compassion can improve our capacity to 'see' and respond to suffering.

A more detailed report on the science of compassion can be accessed here: <https://www.charterforcompassion.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Future-DirectionsReport-2024.pdf>

The potency of wishes

Wishes are powerful – just ask Karen Aren Armstrong. After the winning the best TED talk for 2006, TEDx asked Karen what she wished for and Karen said a more compassionate world. TEDx gave her \$100,000 to bring this wish to fruition and this funding laid the foundation for a global movement led by the Charter for Compassion to be established – the Charter now operates in nearly 600 communities across the world, reaching nearly 6 million people. Wishes work by clarifying what we would like to see in the world around us. Positive psychology has sought to understand how – where we put our attention stimulates our brain to see new opportunities. The saying goes – *where focus goes, energy flows. And where energy flows, whatever we're focusing on grows*. In other words, our lives are guided by what we focus on.

Suggested structure of the session

INFORM – let the students know that they are being invited to participate in a project being organised by Compassionate Ballarat and supported by the City Council.

PROVIDE – some background to the project (as outlined above) and on compassion i.e. that it's about seeing suffering including their own and others and wanting to take action to alleviate it.

ASK – the students where they think suffering shows up in Ballarat – it's likely that you have spoken about some of this already.

CALM – having identified some of those issues – do a short meditation to bring the children into their soothing selves – whatever breathing exercises you do in your wellness session or specific compassion meditation (as below).

SEARCH OUT – ask the children what wishes they have for Ballarat to alleviate some of that suffering. For example these could include a wish that all children in Ballarat can read; that all our teachers, nurses, and paramedics are treated with respect; that every person living in Ballarat has a home; that Ballarat has more adventure playgrounds for children; that people are kinder to each other on social media; that we look after our environment better, etc.

CAPTURE – these wishes and send 4–5 back to us via this email – l.reeder@federation.edu.au

PLANT – the other wishes in a garden or a planter box on your school grounds to formally recognise your school's participation in this project. Take photos and send the images of the individual school plantings to us. They will then be captured and shared through local, national, and global Charter for Compassion social media as part of this project.

INFORM – let the students know that their wishes will be captured in a book which will be distributed to your school, across our city and to other compassionate cities across the world.

Please contact us with any questions:

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Further information on the work of the Charter in Ballarat– in Australia – and globally can be found here:

Compassionate Ballarat:
www.compassionateballarat.com.au

Charter for Compassion, Australia:
www.charterforcompassion.com.au

Global Charter for Compassion:
www.charterforcompassion.org



Loving Kindness Meditation

Take a long slow deep breath in and a longer slow deep breath out do that 3 times. Ground your feet, relax your jaw and gently and at your own pace, bring to mind yourself in this moment and saying silently:

May I be safe and protected.

May I be happy and contented.

May I be loving, kind, and compassionate.

May my inner wisdom guide my every interaction.

Then bring to mind all those you know in your school and local community silently saying:

May they be safe and protected.

May they be happy and contented.

May they be loving, kind, and compassionate.

May their inner wisdom guide their very interaction.

Now invite into the field of your heart those around the world, particularly in areas of conflict, saying silently to yourself:

May they be safe and protected.

May they be happy and contented.

May they be loving, kind, and compassionate.

May their inner wisdom guide their very interaction.



Compassionate Ballarat and the City of Ballarat

